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Friday, July 1, 2005

Train depot won't house police hub

Wayne Co. proposes a regional justice center elsewhere that would house the Detroit cops.

By R.J. King / The Detroit News

DETROIT -- Plans for a new Detroit police headquarters at the former Michigan Central Depot have been scrapped with city leaders now favoring a regional justice center elsewhere spearheaded by Wayne County.

The regional center would accommodate several public safety operations.

Rising cost projections for restoring the dilapidated train depot at Michigan Avenue and 14th Street, vacant for more than a decade, proved to be insurmountable, said Deputy Mayor Anthony Adams. "Mayor Kwame Kilpatrick said the police headquarters at the train depot is not occurring," Adams said.

"The regional justice center being proposed by Wayne County has strong merit," he added.

"We are looking at putting Detroit's police headquarters at the center as well as other public safety operations. We are looking at two site proposals right now, one of which we favor."

Adams would not identify the favored site, but did say it was in Detroit. He declined to talk about the other site. He said discussions with Wayne County were moving forward quickly, but there was no timetable for making a formal announcement.

"We feel a regional justice center offering a Detroit Police headquarters, detention facility, courts, Wayne County Sheriff's office, homeland security and other public safety efforts would save everyone involved a lot of money in terms

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Depot dilemma

The Michigan Central Depot was built in 1913, and was vacated in 1988. The now-scrapped plan to renovate it would have cost an estimated \$100 million to \$130 million. The Police Department would have occupied about 300,000 square feet of the depot, which is about half the building. The remainder was to have been filled by other tenants.

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of sharing costs, boosting efficiency and largely eliminating the need to transfer prisoners," Adams said.

If the Detroit Police department joins a regional justice center, Adams said the police headquarters at 1300 Beaubien in Greektown would be sold to a private developer.

"We've already received some proposals for the building that would convert it into housing," he said.

Wayne County spokesman Dennis Niemiec said a 37-member commission formed last year by Executive Robert Ficano to study the need for a regional justice center is researching site locations, costs and operations.

Ficano also has appointed an executive task force, chaired by Wayne County Chief Operating Officer Bella Marshall, to study the issue.

"Four or five sites are being considered, some of which are in Detroit," Niemiec said. Other public safety operations being considered for the justice center include the Wayne County Prosecutor's Office and Family Independence Agency, he added.

The commission, chaired by former Detroit Mayor Dennis Archer and former state treasurer Douglas Roberts, is looking at how to pay for the facility, including selling bonds.

The proposed facility, expected to cost several million dollars, could serve Wayne, Oakland, Macomb, Monroe and Washtenaw counties.

Archer said the regional center would provide savings from shared utility costs, state-of-the-art telecommunications equipment and medical and food services.

One site that may be under consideration is the former State Plaza building, at the Lodge Freeway and Howard in downtown Detroit, that was recently purchased by Downriver industrialist Sam Danou from the state. The twin-tower complex was purchased for \$6.4 million.

"We would certainly entertain making the State Plaza a regional justice center," said Danou, president of Danou Enterprises in Allen Park. "It's well-located, in good condition and ready to go."

The train depot is owned by Manuel "Matty" Moroun, who operates CenTra Inc. in Warren, a multifaceted logistics company that owns and operates the Ambassador Bridge. Dan Stamper, president of the Detroit International Bridge Co., didn't return a phone call Thursday seeking comment.

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